

We claim:

1 1. A first station for supporting a conference call with a plurality of other stations
2 over a packet-switched network, the first station enabling a voice conference in response to a
3 conference request signal received from each of the plurality of other stations, the first station
4 comprising:

5 a storage medium having stored therein a plurality of programming modules
6 including a means for conferencing and a means for establishing a communication channel,
7 wherein

8 said means for conferencing associated with a conference request signal,
9 and

10 said means for establishing a communication channel between the first
11 station and a second station in response to said means for conferencing, the communication
12 channel supporting voice communication over the packet-switched network; and

13 means for mixing input signals which mixes the signals received at the first
14 station to produce a combined signal output which is played at said first station.

1 2. The first station of Claim 1, wherein said means for conferencing enables the first
2 station to be set in conference mode.

1 3. The first station of Claim 1, wherein said means for conferencing is configured to
2 transmit a signal which causes the plurality of stations to indicate the establishing of said
3 communication channel.

1 4. The first station of Claim 1, further comprising:
2 means, in communication with said means for conferencing, for authorizing a
3 station to establish a communication channel based upon receiving an identification code having
4 a pre-designated association to the conference call.

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1 5. The first station of Claim 4, wherein the identification code uniquely identifies the
2 second station.

1 6. The first station of Claim 5, wherein the identification code includes a valid call-
2 reference.

1 7. The first station of Claim 4, wherein the authorizing means is configured to
2 prevent the establishing of a communication channel between the first and second stations if the
3 second station is not authorized to obtain access to the conference call.

1 8. The first station of Claim 1, further comprising:
2 means for transferring a communication channel between the first and second
3 stations to a third station when said second station disconnects from the conference call, the
4 transferring means in communication with the second station, wherein the channel establishment
5 module establishes a communication channel between the first and third stations based upon a
6 transfer signal provided by said second station.

1 9. The first station of Claim 8, wherein the transfer signal includes a conference
2 request signal designating the third station.

1 10. The first station of Claim 8, wherein the conference request signal and includes a
2 call-reference identifying the second station.

1 11. The first station of Claim 8, further comprising:
2 means, in communication with said means for conferencing, for monitoring the
3 packet-switched network and evaluating network conditions affecting quality of service, said
4 second station providing the transfer signal in response to said means for monitoring the packet-
5 switched network.

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1 12. The first station of Claim 1, wherein the first station is a telephonic device and
2 can establish a voice communication channel over a packet-switched network.

1 13. A method for establishing a conference call at a first station with a plurality of
2 stations over a packet-switched network, the method comprising the steps of:
3 receiving a first conference request signal at a first station;
4 establishing a first communication channel between the first station and a second
5 station;
6 receiving a second conference request signal at the first station;
7 establishing a second communication channel between the first station and a third
8 station; and
9 mixing the input signals from the first and second communication channels at the
10 first station and playing a combined signal output at said first station.

1 14. The method of Claim 13, wherein the first station is in conference mode such that
2 said first station can support a conference call.

1 15. The method of Claim 13, further comprising the step of:
2 indicating to the first, second, and third stations the establishment of the first and
3 second communication channels.

1 16. The method of Claim 13, further comprising the steps of:
2 prior to performing the step of establishing the first communication channel,
3 determining whether the first station can support a communication channel for voice
4 communication over the packet-switched network with the second station; and
5 if so, performing said establishing step between the first and second stations,
6 else, sending a transfer signal which includes a conference request
7 command designating a fourth station.

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1 17. The method of Claim 16, wherein the conference request command triggers the
2 second station to establish a communication channel between the second and fourth stations.

1 18. The method of Claim 16, wherein the conference request command includes a
2 call-reference and identifies the first station.

1 19. The method of Claim 16, wherein the conference request command designates the
2 fourth station based on network conditions affecting quality of service.

1 20. The method of Claim 13, further comprising the step of:
2 determining whether the second and third stations are authorized to establish a
3 communication channel with the first station.

1 21. The method of Claim 20, wherein the step of determining whether the second and
2 third stations are authorized to establish a communication channel with the first station
3 comprises the steps of:
4 pre-designating an identification code of each authorized station in a memory unit
5 of the first station, wherein the identification code uniquely identifies the authorized stations; and
6 determining whether the first station receives an authorized identification code
7 from the second and third stations.

1 22. The method of Claim 20, wherein the step of determining whether the second and
2 third stations are authorized to establish a communication channel with the first station
3 comprises the steps of:
4 signaling the first station from the second station;
5 signaling the first station from the third station; and
6 determining whether the first station receives appropriate response signals from
7 said second and third stations.

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1 23. The method of Claim 20, wherein if it is determined that the second or third
2 station is not authorized to establish a communication channel with the first station, denying said
3 second or third station access to said first station.

1 24. The method of Claim 13, wherein the first station is a telephonic device and can
2 establish a voice communication channel over a packet-switched network.

1 25. A method for maintaining a conference call when a first station disconnects from
2 the conference call, the method comprising the steps of:

3 determining whether a communication channel between the first station and a
4 second station is supported at said first station;

5 if it is determined that a communication channel is supported at the first station,
6 then transferring the communication channel to a third station,

7 else, disconnecting the first station from the conference call.

1 26. The method of Claim 25, wherein the step of transferring the communication
2 channel to a third station further comprises the step of:

3 identifying a third station to transfer the communication channel based on
4 network conditions affecting quality of service determined by the first station.

1 27. The method of Claim 25, wherein the step of transferring the communication
2 channel to a third station includes providing a call-reference identifying the first station.

1 28. A first station for supporting a conference call with a plurality of other stations
2 over a packet-switched network, the first station comprising:

3 a storage medium having stored therein a plurality of programming modules
4 including a conferencing module and a channel establishment module, wherein

5 the conferencing module receives a conference request signal from a
6 second station and determines whether to establish a communication channel between the first
7 and second stations, and

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8 based upon the determination of the conferencing module, said channel
9 establishment module establishing the communication channel which supports voice
10 communication over the packet-switched network; and

11 a mixing module for mixing input signals received at the first station to produce a
12 combined signal output which is played at said first station.

1 29. The first station of Claim 28, wherein the conferencing module transmits a signal
2 and causes the plurality of stations to indicate the establishing of the communication channel.

1 30. The first station of Claim 28, further comprising an authorization module, in
2 communication with the conferencing module, for determining whether the second station is
3 authorized to establish a voice communication channel with the first station.

1 31. The first station of Claim 30, wherein the authorization module determines
2 whether the second station is authorized based upon receiving an identification code having a
3 pre-designated association to the conference call.

1 32. The first station of Claim 31, wherein the identification code uniquely identifies
2 the second station.

1 33. The first station of Claim 32, wherein the identification code includes a valid call-
2 reference.

1 34. The first station of Claim 30, wherein the authorization module is configured to
2 prevent the establishing of a communication channel between the first and second stations if the
3 second station is not authorized to obtain access to the conference call.

1 35. The first station of Claim 28, further comprising a transfer controller for
2 transferring the communication channel between the first and second stations to a third station
3 when said second station disconnects from the conference call, the transfer controller in

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4 communication with the second station, wherein the channel establishment module establishes a
5 communication channel between the first and third stations based upon a transfer signal provided
6 by said second station.

1 36. The first station of Claim 35, wherein the transfer signal includes a conference
2 request signal designating the third station.

1 37. The first station of Claim 36, wherein the transfer signal includes a call-reference
2 identifying the second station.

1 38. The first station of Claim 35, further comprising a network monitoring module for
2 monitoring the packet-switched network and evaluating network conditions affecting quality of
3 service, said second station providing the transfer signal in response to an evaluation by said
4 ~~network monitoring module.~~